

## Rote or Rule? Exploring the Role of Formulaic Language in Classroom Foreign Language Learning

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This article investigates the role in learning of rote-learned formulas or chunks. We examined data from a longitudinal study of 16 child beginner classroom learners of French for occurrences of three chunks, against which we first tried out definitional criteria. We then tracked these forms for 2 years to chart their breakdown and explore their contribution to the development of a creative language capacity. Our data showed that most of the learners not only gradually “unpacked” their early chunks, but also used parts of them productively in the generation of new utterances. These findings demonstrated that rote-learning of formulas and the construction of rules are not independent processes, but interact and actively feed into one another.

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Formulaic language has not figured prominently in second language acquisition (SLA) research in the last 20 years. Studies have tended to focus instead on the importance of creative, rule-governed processes in SLA, and on the systematic nature of learner language. Formulaic language has not been ignored, however. Both first (L1) and second (L2) language learning researchers have explored formulaic language under a variety of labels: pre-fabricated routines and patterns, imitated utterances, formulas, formulaic units (e.g., for L1: Clark, 1974, 1977; Hickey, 1993; Peters, 1983; Plunkett, 1993; Snow, 1981; and for L2: Hakuta, 1974; Huang & Hatch, 1978; Raupach, 1984; Towell, 1987; Vihman, 1982; Weinert, 1995; Wong-Fillmore, 1976). These different terms embrace the notion of rote-learned or imitated chunks of unanalysed language, available for learner use without being derived from generative rules. Debate has focused on the part played by such chunks in language acquisition, particularly the extent of their role in the development of creative language use. The vexed issue of the definition/identification of such chunks also has figured prominently in discussions of formulaic language.

Identification of unanalysed chunks in learner language (as opposed to utterances generated by rules) raises problems in its attempt to infer process from product; researchers have taken samples of learner production and tried to identify particular utterances as either rule-driven or rote-learned. Preliminary identification of utterances as chunks has often rested on an intuitive approach, which in the literature has not been atypical: Bahns, Burmeister and Vogel (1986), for example, justified their use of intuitive criteria. Difficulty has arisen when analysts have tried to chart the apparent breakdown of chunks in learner language, because at this point the problem of distinguishing rote-learned from creative utterances becomes especially acute: How do we know whether the learner retrieves a particular utterance as an unanalysed whole or derives it creatively from a rule, or, indeed, whether and to what extent both co-exist in the learner's interlanguage? Although the identifying criteria used by both L1 and L2 researchers overlap a good deal (see, e.g., Peters,

1983; Weinert, 1995, for extensive discussion), the issue is by no means clear-cut.

The literature has suggested a range of criteria for chunk identification, of which those most commonly used are as follows (based largely on Peters, 1983, 1985; Weinert, 1995):

1. at least two morphemes in length;
2. phonologically coherent, that is fluently articulated, non-hesitant;
3. unrelated to productive patterns in the learner's speech;
4. greater complexity in comparison with the learner's other output;
5. used repeatedly and always in the same form;
6. may be inappropriate (syntactically, semantically or pragmatically) or otherwise idiosyncratic;
7. situationally dependent;
8. community-wide in use.

Generally, definitions embrace the notion of a multi-morphemic unit memorised and recalled as a whole, rather than generated from individual items based on linguistic rules. All definitions also incorporate a distinction between entirely fixed strings (e.g., *How do you do?*) and "patterns" with open slots (e.g., *That's a . . .*). However, it is clear from perusing the list above that the nature of the defining criteria is somewhat unsettled: Criteria may sometimes fluctuate in terms of their applicability (a chunk in the process of breaking down will not always be invariant in form, for example). Neither will the application of such criteria necessarily identify an utterance as formulaic (as Wong-Fillmore, 1976, and Peters, 1983, both noted). Nonetheless, we found the above criteria broadly adequate for identifying potential unanalysed chunks, although with two caveats.

First, the criterion relating to situational dependence opened up the issue of classroom versus non-instructed input. It is

perhaps a defining feature of formulaic utterances in L2 classrooms that they are not situationally bound in the way that such utterances are in more "naturalistic" language use. Weinert (1994) suggested that they may be, rather, the result of initial formal constraints imposed in the classroom, and cites various classroom studies that report as common features the drilling and memorisation of structures within a linguistically restricted context together with an emphasis on early production of complex forms (e.g., Bolander, 1989; Eubank, 1987; Felix, 1981; Mitchell, 1988). We have reported the findings from our own classroom observation data elsewhere (e.g., Mitchell & Martin, 1997), but the ongoing analysis suggests that such features are also common to the classrooms we studied, particularly in the early stages of learning. Many of the observed speaking activities effectively involved the drilling of (often relatively complex) target forms, with an emphasis on correct production; for example, pupils might work in pairs on an information-gap activity with text or picture cues, taking turns at asking and answering questions using fixed expressions such as *qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire?* and *j'aime la natation*. Such activities typically followed on from similar whole-class practice, where the teacher would nominate individual pupils to answer. They tended to occur in short bursts of up to 5 minutes (though often less) at perhaps one or two points in any one lesson. Although the emphasis in both schools was clearly on oral production, these expressions were reinforced by written materials available to the pupils.

Second, the criterion of community-wide use stands somewhat apart from the others, all of them properties inherent to the chunk itself. It is also necessary to consider the nature of the input, which is closely bound up with the issue of chunks occurring in situationally-specific ways. This appears to us as a separate, but parallel criterion, learner-external rather than an intrinsic property of the learner's interlanguage: Potential unanalysed chunks might be salient in the input (either through their frequency or through being emphasised in some way).

The part formulaic language plays in language acquisition is equally problematic, with debate traditionally revolving around three proposed functions (cf. Weinert, 1995). First, learners' use of formulaic language can be a communicative strategy, allowing them entry into minimal communication; they use it because of a lack of competence in target language rules. Second, its use may be a production strategy, where it allows for fluency in production and faster processing (Raupach, 1984). In both L1 and L2 acquisition research, however, debate has largely centred on a third proposed function, where learners' imitation of unanalysed utterances contributes to their developing an emerging grammatical competence. The debate centres on whether learners gradually "unpack" the initially unanalysed utterances and begin to use parts of them productively to generate new utterances, or whether they merely drop such rote-learned utterances from their speech repertoire as their creative, rule-governed competence develops along a different route.

In her extensive doctoral study, Wong-Fillmore (1976) claimed a central role for formulaic speech in L2 learning, arguing that imitated utterances provide material for the learner to eventually analyse, the resulting pieces themselves becoming part of the learners' developing linguistic system. Wong-Fillmore examined formulas in the speech of 5 Spanish-speaking children, aged 5 to 7, acquiring English in an American kindergarten. Essentially, she tracked the learners' speech across time to see when parts of formulas were apparently freed up for use elsewhere, concluding that "the strategy of acquiring formulaic speech is central to the learning of language (. . .) it is this step that puts the learner in a position to perform the analysis which is prerequisite to acquisition" (1976, p. 640). She argued that once the learners had the formulas in their speech repertoires they could begin the work of analysis (at whatever level), to free up recurring parts of the formulas and recombine them with other formulas or with newly learned lexical items. The final stage in the process would occur when all the constituents of the original formula had been released and could be used productively elsewhere, "What the learner

derives from the analysis of formulas already in his own speech repertory are grammatical rules, and these rules, which form the bases for productive speech, gradually free him from his early dependence on formulaic speech" (p. 300).

However, the literature also has raised an alert about the difficulty of identifying, in the case of native speakers (NSs) as well as L2 learners, when or whether an utterance was retrieved as an unanalysed whole or creatively constructed. Many studies have documented that an utterance may continue to occur (and co-exist) as a formulaic unit even after it has apparently been analysed into its constituent parts (e.g., Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Pawley & Syder, 1983).

Other authors have argued a relatively minor role for the learning of unanalysed chunks; Krashen and Scarcella (1978), for example, concluded that formulaic speech is a means of outperforming competence, but does not feed into the creative construction process, which evolves quite independently. More recently, others have argued that researchers may have underestimated the role of formulaic language in L2 development (e.g., Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1997; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Peters, 1983, 1985; Towell & Hawkins, 1994). In the case of classroom foreign language learners, who may invest considerable effort in memorising formulas, it is particularly important to clarify formulaic language's contribution to learning.

The role of formulaic language in L2 development forms the main focus of our research, set against the backdrop of the initial identification of such language. We explore it with reference to 3 potential chunks, drawing on data from a longitudinal study of child classroom learners of French.

## Method

### *Overview*

The project, "Progression in Foreign Language Learning," ran for three years, from September 1993 until August 1996. Its principal aims were threefold: to document the rate and route of progression of a group of classroom learners during their first 2 years of learning French as a foreign language (FFL), from ages 11 to 13; to explore links between that progression and classroom learning experiences; and to explore the particular role in classroom learning of the rote-learning of unanalysed chunks. We documented the learning activities of the cohort of 60 pupils, 30 in each of 2 British secondary schools, through regular classroom observation across the classes involved, and monitored their progress in speaking French by means of a range of specially devised elicitation tasks administered on 6 occasions at regular intervals over the 2 school years. We also interviewed the teachers involved at 2 points during the data-collection period, in order to record both their observations of the pupils' progress and their thoughts on the teaching and learning processes.

### *Participants*

Our analysis here concentrates on a subset of 16 pupils from the main cohort. The main criterion for choice of the pupil subset was that there should be a balanced sample in terms of school, gender, and number of tasks undertaken. The sample was, however, biased in favour of high achievers; we hoped that, by weighting our sample in this way, we might maximise our chances of seeing development, particularly in the early stages. The sample comprised 4 girls and 4 boys in each of the 2 schools, who were assigned by their language teachers, at the end of their first year of learning French in mixed-ability classes, to sets grouped according to perceived ability as follows: 8 in top-ability sets, 5 in mid-ability sets and 3 in lower-ability sets.

*Data Elicitation*

We devised relatively unplanned oral production tasks, which focused on meaning, not form, at least as far as possible within the constraints of the classroom context. We intended to set the pupils spoken French tasks that would show what they could do in a relatively unplanned, communicative context. Each round of data-gathering included a pair-task which involved an information gap activity, pupils in turn having to find out information from their partner (e.g., exchange of personal information, likes and dislikes, etc.). In each round, there was also a one-to-one interaction with an adult researcher. One-to-one tasks ranged from the use of the researcher's personal family photos to elicit questions from the pupil and to lead into "conversation" about the pupil's own family life and leisure activities to information-gap activities and story re-telling. Details of the tasks analysed are in the Appendix.

Each round of data gathering took place towards the end of each of 6 consecutive school terms. Rounds 1 and 2 corresponded to the pupils' second and third terms in their first year of learning French ("Year 7" in the English school system); Rounds 3 to 5 corresponded to all three terms of their second year ("Year 8"), and Round 6 to the first term of their third year ("Year 9").

*Identification of Chunks*

We focused on 3 potential unanalysed chunks, *j'aime* (I like), *j'adore* (I love) and *j'habite* (I live). It seemed to us, from a close reading of the data when transcribed<sup>1</sup> and checked, that a number of potential chunks were occurring. These included the following:

1. Certain question forms, for example *où habites-tu?*, *quel âge as-tu?*;
2. Certain utterances expressing negation, for example *je ne comprends pas*, *je ne sais pas*, *je n'ai pas*, *je n'aime pas*;
3. Certain utterances containing the first person subject pronoun, for example *j'ai*, *j'aime*, *j'adore*, *j'habite*.



These utterances had to us the feel of formulaic language; the learners commonly over-extended these utterances in use, by comparison with target language norms, whether syntactically, semantically or pragmatically. For example, they typically over-extended the question forms in this fashion. (The following examples are glossed with their literal translation, followed, where needed, by their most likely intended meaning interpreted from the discourse context.)

- (1) *quel âge as-tu that one?*  
(how old are you that one?, pupil 24, Round 2)
- (2) *mon petit garçon euh où habites-tu?*  
(my little boy where do you live? = where does the little boy live?, 45, 2)

Utterances expressing negation were also over-extended, for example:

- (3) *le collègue? .. je n'aime pas?*  
(school? .. I don't like? = what don't you like at school?, pupil 51, 2)
- (4) *je ne sais pas la magasin*  
(I don't know the shop = I don't like shopping, 03, 4)

Potential chunks with the contracted first-person pronoun were often used in similar ways:

- (5) *la Monique j'ai .. j'ai adore .. la tennis*  
(Monique I have I have love tennis = Monique loves tennis, pupil 02, 2)
- (6) *une famille .. j'habite un maison*  
(a family I live in a house = the family lives in a house, 12, 3)

The over-extension of such utterances seemed a powerful indicator of unanalysed chunk use. We selected potential chunks within each of the categories above for more detailed exploration, although in this article we focus on the first-person verb forms

only. These potential chunks fit the criteria we had uncovered during our extensive literature search on formulaic language. For example, during Round 2 of the data collection, verbs of preference with the first person were particularly salient in the input, in School 1 in particular (i.e., *j'aime*, *je n'aime pas*, *j'adore*, *je déteste*, *je préfère*); this fact, taken in conjunction with the pupils' frequent over-extension of such utterances, might reinforce our judgment that *j'aime*, for example, was often produced as a formulaic unit by some of our learners, at least at that particular stage. Having identified our 3 first-person verb forms as potential formulaic units, we could then move into a detailed exploration of their possible contribution to a creative language capacity.

### *Tracking Chunks*

An initial trawl of our data suggested that units such as *j'aime* had a role as rapid processing devices, given the pattern of their use in the tasks we set the learners, where, as we noted earlier, they were regularly used in an over-extended fashion in situations of communicative pressure (e.g., *j'aime?* = do you like (it)?, *Monique j'aime* . . = Monique likes . . , etc.).

We set out to track these potential chunks to see when parts might apparently be released for use elsewhere or occur in combination with other items, focusing on the issue of whether the learners appeared to be at some level analysing chunks whose more immediate function was to serve a communicative purpose and/or to act as rapid processing units. These questions we translated into more detailed search criteria applicable to our chosen chunks.

### *Tracking "j'aime," "j'adore," "j'habite"*

On the face of it, *j'aime*, *j'adore* and *j'habite* might seem somewhat restricted forms to qualify as unanalysed chunks. Nevertheless, a chunk such as *j'aime* can tell us something of the learner's entry into the French verb system more generally. Harley

(1992) noted the frequent use by immersion students of French of nonsegmented *j'ai* as an equivalent of the first person pronoun *I* in English, and argued that their failure to grasp the dual status of *j'ai* as pronoun and auxiliary (*je* = I, *ai* = have) was bound to delay their entry into the French verb system.

So, in tracking the chunks *j'aime*, *j'adore* and *j'habite*, an over-arching question was whether and how the learners, as verbs with *j'* proliferated in their speech, began to take account of the segmentation issue in their developing interlanguages, and what bearing their use of verb forms with other subject pronouns had on this process. In devising procedures for tracking the chunks, we drew also on Ellis (1984), who studied 3 classroom learners and examined the apparently formulaic utterance *I don't know* to see how it evolved. The questions we asked of our data were very similar to Ellis's:

1. (when) were *j'/je* used elsewhere?
2. (when) were *aime /adore /habite* released for use without *je*?
3. (when) did alternative subjects to *je* occur?
4. (when) did alternative verbs occur?

To an extent, the first 2 questions overlap with the second 2, although they have slightly different emphases. After we translated these questions into more detailed search criteria, we searched the data for the 16 subset pupils across Rounds 1 to 6 for any and all occurrences of:

1. *j'aime / j'adore / j'habite*;
2. the verbs *aimer /adorer /habiter* used elsewhere;
3. the contracted pronoun *j'* used elsewhere;
4. the pronoun '*je*'.

Results

Occurrences of *j'aime* / *j'adore* / *j'habite*

The data for the subset comprised a total of 192 transcribed tasks, each of which on average represented about 15 minutes of spoken interaction. (For details of the tasks, see the Appendix.) Of the 16 pupils under scrutiny, 14 used *j'aime*, 10 used *j'habite* and 9 used *j'adore* at some point in the 6 rounds of data-gathering. Only one pupil (45) did not use any of these forms in the data-set. The pattern of use of *j'aime*, *j'habite* and *j'adore* is shown in Table 1; the “TL” columns detail target-like use, and the “x” columns give incidences of over-extended use. The numbers at the top of each column are those allocated to individual pupils.

Table 1

Use of *j'aime*, *j'habite* and *j'adore* over all rounds

	02		03		09		12		24		25		26		27	
	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x
<i>j'aime</i>	7	2	12	25	25	0	7	27	1	5	0	2	1	9	20	1
<i>j'habite</i>	3	0	5	0	5	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	1	3	0
<i>j'adore</i>	9	2	31	15	2	0	6	1	2	0	0	1	1	7	1	2
TOTAL	19	4	48	40	32	0	15	30	4	5	0	4	4	17	24	3
TOTAL	23		88		32		45		9		4		21		27	

  

	34		38		43		45		51		52		57		60	
	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x
<i>j'aime</i>	0	15	3	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	17	8	4	6	1
<i>j'habite</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0
<i>j'adore</i>	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	15	3	10	2	8	0	0	1	0	0	17	12	4	7	1
TOTAL	15		13		10		0		1		17		16		8	

Note: TL column = target-like use; x column = over-extended use

Some interesting observations immediately emerged. The pupils frequently used *j'aime*, in particular, in over-extended ways, for example:

- (7) *j'aime les professeurs?* .. (whispers) teachers .. do you like the teachers? .. (louder) *j'aime les professeurs à m- mon école?* (I like the teachers .. I like the teachers in my school, pupil 03, round 2)
- (8) *la garçon j'aime le cricket?*  
(the boy I like cricket? = does the boy like cricket?, 12, 4)
- (9) *elle j'aime le shopping*  
(she I like shopping = she likes shopping, 38, 4)
- (10) *Richard j'aime le musée*  
(Richard I like the museum = Richard likes museums, 52, 6)

Pupils in School 1 used all 3 verb forms more extensively (pupils 02–27). That School 1 pupils produced these forms considerably more often than did those of School 2 no doubt depended to some extent on the input: The verb *adorer*, for example, seemed more prevalent in the input in School 1. Relative frequencies of use between rounds (not shown in Table 1) were also affected by the kind of tasks the participants had to perform. This does not, however, explain the variation between pupils within rounds. Looking across all the pupil data reveals patterns that cut across individual schools. Five of the pupils (31%; 02, 09, 27, 57, and 60) used the forms in a predominantly target-like way; five (31%; 26, 34, 38, 43, 52) most often used them in over-extended fashion; three (19%; 03, 12, 24) used a mixture of target and over-extended forms; and the last three (19%; 25, 45, 51) used the forms infrequently or not at all (less than 8 times).

#### *Occurrences of j' elsewhere*

Other than in *j'aime*, *j'adore* and *j'habite*, the contracted first person pronoun occurred very frequently in *j'ai* (I have), but

virtually nowhere else. Every pupil in the subset used *j'ai* at some point in the data-gathering (199 occurrences overall). Documenting the use of *j'ai* was complicated by the fact that 7 pupils (44%) at some stage apparently took *j'ai* to stand for *I*, as in *j'ai adore* (I love), *j'ai déteste* (I hate), *j'ai joue* (I play), *j'ai habite* (I live), *j'ai travaille* (I work). Moreover, 12 pupils (75%) used *j'ai* in over-extended and/or idiosyncratic ways, 2 of them exclusively so (43, 45). Indeed, close examination of the pupils' use of *j'ai* indicates its status as an unanalysed chunk for many of them.

That many of the pupils used *j'ai* in such idiosyncratic, chunk-like ways is unsurprising given its frequency and saliency in the input. Even a brief perusal of the lesson observation data and course materials from the 2 schools revealed the emphasis on exchange of personal information in the target language, particularly in the learners' first year; and much of this information involved the use of *j'ai*. Thus, pupils learnt early to talk about their age and appearance (*j'ai onze ans .. j'ai les yeux bleus*, I'm 11 .. I've got blue eyes), their family and pets (*j'ai une soeur .. j'ai deux hamsters*, I've got a sister .. I've got two hamsters), their friends and relations (*j'ai trois cousins*, I've got three cousins) and their personal belongings (*j'ai un ordinateur*, I've got a computer). Sometime in their second year of French came the focused introduction of the perfect tense, again with much emphasis on the pupils talking about what they themselves had done, be it the previous weekend (*j'ai regardé la télé*, I watched TV), on holiday (*j'ai visité ..*, I visited..), and so on.

In the data, *j'* occurs only on 3 other occasions, with 3 other verbs—*j'aller*, *j'arrive* and *j'écoute*:

- (11) *j'aller à la muse- à la musée .. samedi .. dimanche?*  
(I go to the museum on Saturday .. Sunday? = shall we (I?), pupil 09, 4)
- (12) *ma mère un grand-mère j'arrive à la maison .. en voiture*  
(..) *ma mère et le garçon j'arrive à la .. village .. fait des courses*

(my mum a granma I arrive at home .. by car [...] my mum and the boy I arrive at the village do some shopping = [they] arrive, 26, 6)

- (13) *samedi euh .. j'aime le .. j'aime le .. j'aime le piscine et .. j'écoute le radio*  
(Saturday I like the swimming-pool and I listen to the radio, 27, 5)

In example (12), pupil 26 used *j'arrive* in a chunklike way with a third person plural subject. Pupil 09, however, combined *je* with *aller* (the non-finite form, *to go*, e.g., 11) in apparently creative fashion, albeit that the context made the intended meaning ambiguous. Finally, pupil 27 used the first person pronoun with the verb *écouter* in a targetlike way (e.g., 13). The latter two pupils fall within the pattern of predominantly targetlike use of the first person verb forms; they were probably segmenting pronoun and verb. For other pupils this process developed little, if at all.

### *Occurrences of Je*

We examined the pupils' use of *je* (as opposed to the contracted *j'* form) to see what light this might shed on the segmentation issue. We excluded all occurrences of *je m'appelle* ('I'm called'), a highly likely candidate for chunk status that the pupils regularly used across the 6 rounds. The results appear in Table 2.

Here patterns emerged similar to those already encountered. Pupils again fell into 3 broad groups, similar to those outlined above for the use of chunks. Group 1 (02, 09, 27, 57 and 60) again produced predominantly targetlike forms (with a few over-extended forms—fewer than 6); this is exactly the same group as Group 1 above. Group 2 (3, 12, 24, 26, 43, 45, 52) produced a mixture of targetlike and non-targetlike forms; Group 3 (25, 34, 38 and 51) produced little or no relevant data. These groups are similar to those of the previous section, with the exception of pupils 34 and 38, who overextended chunks but now showed little evidence of

Table 2

Use of “je” excluding “je m’appelle”

PUPIL	02		03		09		12		24		25		26		27	
<i>Je</i>	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x
All																
rounds	16	6	31	31	56	0	23	11	30	14	3	4	10	10	16	0
TOTAL	22		62		56		34		44		7		20		16	
PUPIL	34		38		43		45		51		52		57		60	
<i>je</i>	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x	TL	x
All																
rounds	1	0	6	1	18	10	9	12	0	2	10	10	11	0	18	1
TOTAL	1		7		28		21		2		20		11		19	

Note: TL column = target-like use; x column = over-extended use

producing *je*, and 45, who conversely produced few chunks and overextended *je*.

Unpicking the data further, ignoring a small group of infrequent negative utterances—*je ne sais pas*, *je ne comprends pas*, *je n’ai pas* and *je n’aime pas*<sup>2</sup>—revealed all the remaining uses of *je* set out in Table 3.

There is little or no data for 8 pupils (24, 25, 34, 38, 43, 45, 51, 52). They include the whole of Group 3 (little data produced on the use of chunks and/or on the use of *je*), with an additional 3 pupils (24, 43, 52) from Group 2 (the group which used a mixture of targetlike and overextended forms). The remaining 8 pupils (02, 03, 09, 12, 26, 27, 57 & 60) presented a more varied and informative picture, from which one might infer some progress in tackling the segmentation issue. Again, pupils 02, 03, 09, 27, 57 and 60 figure in the list (Group 1 above). Pupil 09 seemed furthest advanced: He used the highest number of different verbs with *je*, 11 in total across all the rounds, and he began to do so at an early stage. Even discounting his use of verbs of likes and dislikes, which tended to be fairly intensively drilled at an early stage in the classrooms, this pupil produced a number of unique utterances across the



Table 3

*Use of “je” to mean “I” (excluding “je m’appelle” + negative utterances); listed as types, not tokens*

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
02	je aller	je déteste		je déteste je préfère	Je déteste Je vais Je me lève	je déteste
03		je déteste je préfère je joue		je regarder	Je préférer Je jouer	
09	Je comprends	je déteste je préfère je joue je lire	Je suis	je suis je vois	Je regarder Je joue Je vais	je suis je visite je répète?
12		je teste (= I hate) je manger	Je fini		Je me lève Je me lave	
24						
25						
26	je habite	je déteste			Je déteste Je me lève Je me lave Je me couche Je regarder	
27		je mange		je déteste je préfère je retourne je fais je vais /je va		je suis je visiter
34						
38	je habite					
43		je adore			Je déteste	
45		je adore				
51						
52						
57	je suis porte		Je suis			je suis
60					Je déteste Je comprends Je suis allée	je visite

whole data set, *je lire, je vois, je répète?* (I read / I see / (shall) I repeat?), as well as others that very seldom appeared elsewhere, *je suis, je vais, je joue, je regarder* (I am / I go / I play / I watch). Pupil 27 also used a high number of verbs with *je*, 9 in all, including 3 that never appeared elsewhere in the subset database: *je retourne, je fais, je va* (I return / I do / I go). Those two are the pupils who also showed signs of using *j'* creatively. Pupils 02, 03, 12, 26, 57 and 60 all used between 3 and 6 different verbs with *je*.

The subset of pupils who used *je* creatively (outside the chunks under consideration) includes the same pupils who could also use chunks in a target-like way, without over-extending them (pupils 02, 09, 27, and, slightly less clearly, 57 and 60). Those pupils at least (31.25% of the total), seemed aware of the first person reference of the chunks they were using. They also showed evidence of the first person subject pronoun system emerging creatively, independently of the chunks.

#### *Emergence of Other Subject Pronouns*

If the breakdown of the chunks under consideration were in fact linked to the emergence of subject pronouns independently of the formulas, what would the data on the use of other subject pronouns, in particular the third person singular *il* and *elle*, reveal? Again, similar patterns emerge. Looking at those 9 pupils in the subset who seldom used *il* and *elle* (8 times or less across all rounds) produced the results found in Table 4.

With only one exception (38, 5, *il fait manger*), none of these 9 pupils used *il* or *elle* with verbs other than *a, est* or *s'appelle* (has, is, is called) unless they juxtaposed it with a first-person pronoun and verb (e.g., *il j'ai, elle j'aime*). Exactly the same pupils (+ pupil 12) hardly used *je* outside of chunks (Table 3).

In contrast, the remaining 7 pupils, the group discussed above who showed clear signs of segmentation (plus pupil 24); produced *il* and *elle* both more frequently and with a greater variety of verbs, as shown in Table 5.

Table 4

*Use of “il” and “elle” to mean “he” and “she” in declarative-order utterances; listed as types, not tokens*

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
12	il a elle a elle s'appelle	Il s'appelle elle s'appelle			il est elle(no verb)	
25	Il a			<sup>a</sup> il (no verb) elle(no verb)	<sup>b</sup> elle a elle est	
26				il j'ai (he likes)	il (no verb) il a il est il j'aime elle a elle(no verb)	
34	Elle est (=she's got)					
38	il (no verb) elle(no verb)			elle(no verb) elle j'aime	Il fait manger	
43					elle(no verb)	
45		il (no verb) elle(no verb)				
51			Elle est	il a (= he is)	elle est elle a (she is)	
52			Elle est		il (no verb) il est manger elle(no verb)	

<sup>a</sup> both elicited by R, who asked “*il ou elle?*”

<sup>b</sup> only used “*elle*” when doing the task for a second time

Pupil 09 was again exceptional, using one or other of the singular third-person pronouns with 18 different verbs in addition to *a*, *est* and *s'appelle*. The other pupils shown in Table 5 used between 4 and 6 other verbs, except for pupil 60, who used only 2. (Although pupil 60 was quite advanced in her productions, she was often less “productive” than the others.) These data show that these 7 pupils were producing creative combinations of pronoun and verb. The same learners (Group 1: 02, 09, 27, 57, 60 and,

Table 5

*Use of “il” and “elle” to mean “he” and “she” in declarative-order utterances; listed as types, not tokens*

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
02	il a il est il s'appelle elle a elle est elle s'appelle	il (no verb) il adore elle adore	il y a (= he is) il s'appelle elle peint	il s'appelle elle s'appelle elle (no verb) elle est elle adore	il a il s'appelle il (no verb) elle a elle s'appelle elle habite	Il n'aime Il déteste elle est elle a /regarder, regardé/
03	il a il est il habite il s'appelle elle a elle est elle s'appelle elle a habite	il s'appelle elle s'appelle elle habite		il y a aime il y a s'appelle il y habite elle (no verb) elle y a elle n'a pas nage elle(s) s'appelle(nt)	il a il est il est jouer il adore il va il y habite elle a elle est elle a jouer (.. is..)	il (no verb) il a il adore il j'adore il s'appelle
09	il a il porte il s'appelle elle a elle est elle porte elle habite elle s'appelle	il décrire il est il finit (IT) il habite il s'appelle il adore il aime il déteste il n'aime pas	il a il est il porte il s'appelle elle a elle est elle porte elle s'appelle elle explique elle faire elle regarde elle peint	il a il est il habite il jouer il adore il aime il déteste il s'appelle il fait il n'aime pas il n'aller pas il ne comprend pas elle a elle déteste	il a faire il porte il est elle a faire elle porte elle a elle est	il interviewe elle crée elle faire elle peint  N.B. ils sont (THEY are)

Table 5 (continued)

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
				elle nager pas elle peint elle s'appelle		
24	il est elle s'appelle	il a il s'appelle il aime elle aime elle adore elle a déteste	Elle a (for 'he' as well) elle s'appelle	il (no verb) elle (no verb) elle adore elle non pas nage	il est il s'appelle il a manger (he's eating) elle a elle est elle s'appelle elle fait	il dit elle a elle s'appelle elle est non visiter elle a déteste elle regarder
27	il a il habite il s'appelle elle a elle s'appelle	il adore il aime il n'aime pas il deuxième déteste elle aime elle n'aime pas elle deuxième déteste	il est	il a il habite il s'appelle elle a elle s'appelle	il est il fait il s'appelle elle est elle fait elle s'appelle	il déteste il n'aime pas il j'adore il j'aime
57	il est elle porte	il chanter il jouer elle n'aime pas	il est il s'appelle elle est /allée, aller/	il a il s'appelle elle n'aime pas	il faire il porte elle faire elle porte elle s'appelle	il a il n'aime pas il s'appelle il j'aime
60		il aime il n'aime pas elle aime elle n'aime pas elle aime pas elle (no verb)		il aime	il a il manger elle a	

slightly less clearly, 03 and 24) who had used the chunks in a target-like way (i.e., with correct pronominal reference) also produced creatively a variety of subject pronouns. This result suggests that the emergence of the subject pronoun system is closely linked to the chunk analysis process.

*Occurrences of Aimer, Adorer, Habiter without J'*

Tables 6 through 9 show where the three verbs *aimer*, *adorer*, *habiter* occurred independently of *j'* contracted first person pronoun. We excluded any instances of *n'aime(s) pas*, and *où habites-tu?*, because both these utterances seemed probably to have chunk status. The more substantial body of data for *aimer* appears separately first (Table 6).

As Table 6 shows, a quarter of the pupils used *aimer* independently of *j'* in Round 1 (all in School 2), three-quarters in round 2, and about a third in Rounds 4, 5 and 6. In Round 1, three pupils used *aimer* with *qu'est-ce que: qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire?* (34, 60) and *qu'est-ce que tu aimes?* (57). The remaining pupil who produced *aimer* independently of *j'* (52) used it idiosyncratically:

Table 6

*Number of times "aime(s)" occurred without "j'" (excluding "n'aime(s) pas")*

Pupils	02	03	09	12	24	25	26	27	34	38	43	45	51	52	57	60
Round 1									1					2	1	1
Round 2	9		33	3	6	1	1	8	8	40			4		4	11
Round 3																
Round 4	1	1	8				7								2	1
Round 5			5				1	3	/		1				2	
Round 6	1	1	11			/		1							3	
TOTAL (182)	11	2	57	3	6	1	9	12	9	40	1	0	4	2	12	13

Note: A slash mark represents the pupil's absence from a particular round.

- (14) *umm tu aimes faire as-* (<'s' sounded) *as-tu aime(s) faire?*  
 (do you like doing do you have like doing? = what does the  
 girl like doing?)

She used a mixture of two chunks, *as-tu* (very salient in the early classroom input) and *tu aimes*. It seems probable that she and the other 3 pupils just used *tu aimes* or *qu'est-ce que tu aimes* as unanalysed chunks at this early stage.

In Round 2, the pair-task was an information-gap task centring on likes and dislikes; therefore, we expected it to produce a high incidence of verbs such as *aimer* and *adorer*. We attempted to assess whether the pupils' frequent use of the verb *aimer* in this task suggested they were freeing it up from the first person pronoun, or whether they produced it in a way suggesting chunk use. It occurred most frequently in this task (apart from *j'aime*) with interrogative constructions involving *qu'est-ce que* (what), such as *qu'est-ce que tu aimes?*, *qu'est-ce qu'il aime?* We found no evidence of non-formulaic use at this point.

Turning to all remaining instances in Rounds 2 to 6 of the use of *aimer* apart from *j'aime* and *n'aime (pas)* proved more instructive, however (Table 7).

One could argue that those pupils who used *aime* standing alone or with a proper name specific to a particular task (e.g., *Monique* in Round 2) were segmenting the verb away from the subject pronoun. In addition, pupils who were using a variety of pronouns with *aimer* probably had advanced further along the road in tackling the segmentation issue. The data in Table 7 suggest that most of the pupils were at some stage beginning to treat *aime* as a separate constituent, particularly where the data demonstrate some degree of progression over time. Eight of the pupils (12, 24, 25, 34, 38, 45, 51, 52), did not use *aime* in this context (if at all) beyond Round 2, making it difficult to infer very much about the possible breakdown of *j'aime*. Pupil 43 only produced a single instance of *tu aimes* in Round 5; he never used *j'aime* across the 6 rounds. The remaining 7 pupils (02, 03, 09, 26, 27, 57, 60), were also those who used both the first- and third-person verb

Table 7

Occurrences of “aimer” with a subject pronoun other than “j,” with a noun or on its own

PUPIL	ROUND 1	ROUND 2	ROUND 4	ROUND 5	ROUND 6
02		Monique aime			aimes ..? (do you like)
03			il y a aime ..? (does he like?)		aime (partner asked how to say <i>likes</i> )
09		il aime (2 = SHE) tu aimes ..?	il aime nous aime	tu aimes?	il aime
12		aime? (he likes it?) 2 tu aimes (+ infin)? (both repeats of partner's Qs)			
24		elle aime N.B. 5 j'ai aime			
25		aime (asked <i>aime</i> <i>ou n'aime pas</i> ?)			/
26		N.B. j'ai aime	tu aimes ..? (does HE like?)	N.B. j'ai aime	
27		il aime elle aime Pierre aime		tu aimes .. ?	tu aimes ..?
34	Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire?	N.B. j'ai aime ..? (do YOU like?) tu aimes (I like)		/	
38		tu aimes ..?			
43				tu aimes ..?	
45					
51		tu aimes (SHE/HE likes)			
52	tu aimes faire as-tu aime(s) faire?				
57	Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?	Pierre aime Monique aime	Vous aime et moi aime	tu aimes ..?	qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire? tu aimes faire ..?
60	Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire?	il aime elle aime elle aime pas	il aime		

Note: Excluding Round 3, since no occurrences, and excluding “n’aime (pas).” A slash mark represents the pupil’s absence from a particular round.



forms more extensively and in predominantly targetlike ways across the six rounds: they seemed to be tackling the segmentation issue with some success. Tables 8 and 9 set out the relevant data on the use of *habite* and *adore*, respectively.

Although all pupils bar one (45) used *aime* independently of *j'* at some point across Rounds 1 to 6, only 9 and 7 of the 16 pupils used *habite* and *adore* in similar fashion, respectively. Pupils 02, 03, 09, and 27 could use those verbs creatively, reinforcing our finding that they were breaking down the chunks and feeding them into their creative construction.

On the basis of the data for all 3 verbs, and more especially *aimer*, more than a third of the pupils (37.5%; 02, 03, 09, 27, 57, 60) were freeing up the verb for use independently of *j'* at some stage.

## Discussion

Our primary question was whether the learners could gradually “unpack” the initially unanalysed utterances and use parts of them productively in generating new utterances. Second, we examined whether the study of chunk breakdown enables us to infer any attendant implications for developmental routes more generally.

### *Processes of Chunk Breakdown*

The pupil subset broadly exhibited 3 emerging patterns. About a third of the pupils (31.25%; 02, 09, 27, 57, 60) broke down the chunks under investigation;<sup>3</sup> moreover, this process was clearly linked to the emergence of the subject pronoun system. A further third (31.25%; 25, 34, 43, 45, 51) provided little or no evidence that they were doing likewise; those remaining (37.5%; 03, 12, 24, 26, 38, 52) presented a more mixed picture,<sup>4</sup> but nonetheless showed clear signs of the breakdown process's beginnings.

Table 8

Occurrences of “habiter” other than “j’habite” and “où habites-tu?”

PUPIL	ROUND 1	ROUND 2	ROUND 4	ROUND 5
02		il habite(s)-tu? elle habite(s)-tu?	où habite un salon? (where is .. ?)	elle habite moi grandparents <sup>a</sup> habite(nt) (town) où habite (name)?
03	il a .. elle a habite? (does she live ..?) il habite	elle habite	il y habite Alan? il y habite (town)? il y habite une piscine? (where is?)	il y habite à (ambiguous = I??)
09	elle habite où?	il habite où?	il habite j’ai cinq qui habite(nt) à (town) et habite à (town) (and lives ..)	
12				
24		où habite(nt) Angleterre? do they live in England? j’ai bite	j’ai habite	j’ai habite
25				
26	je habite		j’ai habite j’ai habite (HE lives) j’ai habite? (where does he live?) habite(=[SHE]lives)	
27	il habite où?		is it il habite? il habite où?	
34				
38	je habite			
43			j’ai habite	
45				
51	où habite (= I live) /euh, où/ habite (= I live)	/euh, où/ habite (= I live)		où habite (= I live)
52				
57				
60				

Note: Excluding Rounds 3 and 6, since no occurrences.

<sup>a</sup>Both s’s of “grandparents” are sounded.

Table 9

*Occurrences of “adorer” Rounds 2-6, other than “j’adore”*

PUPIL	ROUND 2	ROUND 4	ROUND 5	ROUND 6
02	il adore ..? (2A) elle adore ..?(2A) j’ai adore (2D) Monique j’ai adore	elle adore j’ai adore adore? (loves?)		Richard tu adores ? (= does HE love ..?)
03		adore (= I love)	il adore le livre? (is he reading?) il adore le foot? (is he playing f’ball?)	il adore
09	tu adores ..? il adore (1 = SHE) qu’est-ce qu’il adore?	il adore		il adore
12				
24	j’ai adore il aime .. j’ai adore j’ai adore (SHE/HE) (name) j’ai adore she adore elle adore	elle adore j’ai adore tu adores .. ? (= SHE?) tu adores .. ? (to researcher)	j’ai adore tu adores ..? ((what) do you love?)	j’ai adore
25				
26				
27	il adore			
34				
38				
43	j’ai adore (name) j’ai adore j’ai adore (= HE)			
45	je adore j’ai adore j’ai adore (= SHE) (name) j’ai adore			
51				
52				
57				
60				

*Note:* Excluding Rounds 1 and 3, since no occurrences.

Some particularly eloquent examples from this last group, eloquent because they made the process of analyzing the chunks visible in places, illustrate this process. The most prominent examples of explicit self-monitoring occurred in the Round 2 pairtask, where the pupils were exchanging information about two imaginary French friends' likes and dislikes:

- (15) *oh she déteste it (..) et la Monique .. umm .. j'ai adore la géographie .. la Monique .. non she adore j'ai adore le Monique does .. oh it doesn't matter (..) j'ai no hang on a minute elle aime .. la reg- non umm .. umm .. oh how do you say it? umm elle aime .. umm .. regarder le musique or something like that (..) she likes musique .. j'ai adore /la, le/ musique (..) j'ai déte- umm elle no .. elle a déteste la piscine (..) euh j'ai adore .. oh no Monique j'ai adore .. no Monique ELLE adore la .. regarder la télévision*  
 (oh she hates it [...] and the Monique .. I have love geography.. the Monique .. no she loves I have love the Monique does .. oh it doesn't matter [...] I have no hang on a minute she likes the watc- no .. oh how do you say it? she likes .. watching music or something like that [...] she likes music .. I have love music [...] I have hat- she no .. she has hates the swimming-pool [...] euh I have love .. oh no Monique I have love .. no Monique SHE loves the .. watching TV, pupil 24, Round 2)

This pupil clearly struggled with the need to establish third person reference; she realised that *j'ai* was inappropriate, but had problems finding an alternative form. She produced a further relevant example in Round 4 also:

- (16) *mon soeur .. j'ai adore umm .. elle adore la euh .. elle fait les magasins*  
 (my sister .. I have love .. she loves the .. she goes shopping,  
 24, 4)

Although the pupil's interlanguage at these points accommodated the use of *je* and its contracted form for both first and third

person reference, this usage was beginning to give way to a more creative “rule”-based one, which appropriately matched pronoun and verb form in preference to the more wholesale use of chunks, or at least to a realisation that clearer reference was required. Other examples of this articulated self-monitoring occurred elsewhere; for example, pupils 02, 03, and 38 produced the following utterances:

- (17) *j'ai ah no il .. il cheveux brown? (..) j'ai .. oh no umm .. il .. soeur?*  
 (I have ah no he .. he brown hair? [...] I have .. oh no .. he .. sister?, 02, 2)
- (18) *Richard tu n'aimes? .. Richard IL n'aimes? sorry* (“s” of *aimes* sounded)  
 (Richard you don't like? .. Richard HE doesn't like? sorry, 02, 6)
- (19) *j'ai .. no oh .. elle habite le* (town)  
 (I have .. no oh .. she lives in [town], 03, 2)
- (20) *il .. j'ador- il adore la livre?*  
 (he .. I lov- does he love the book?, 03, 5)
- (21) (whispers) *no il y habite* (louder) *il y habite*  
 (no he lives .. he lives, [correcting partner's *j'habite*, “I live”], 03, 5)
- (22) *no il il*  
 (“no he, he” [correcting partner's *j'ai* = “I”], 03, 6)
- (23) *j'aime le sp- elle j'aime le sport (..) euh she likes euh elle .. j'aime la history museum*  
 (I like sp- she I like sport [...] she likes she .. I like history museums, 38, 4)

Such examples clearly show a link between the learners' emerging grasp of the subject pronoun system and the breakdown of the first-person verb chunks. The need to establish explicit reference (third person, in particular) apparently triggered the

breakdown of the chunks. A first step in this process can be to keep the chunk intact, but to add a lexical noun phrase to it in order to make reference clearer (e.g., example 23) before segmenting verb and pronoun. The clear correlation established above, between chunk breakdown on the one hand and the use of a variety of subject pronouns on the other by a subset of the pupils (02, 03, 09, 27, 57 & 60), provide strong evidence that chunk breakdown and the need to establish reference are linked. Those are the pupils whose use of *il* and/or *elle* was well-documented across at least 5 of the 6 rounds. The remaining 9 pupils used these pronouns very patchily, in only one or two rounds at most.

Our findings to this point can be summarised as follows:

1. There is a clear developmental continuum among our learners as far as chunk breakdown is concerned, from those who started the breakdown process early and who had gone a long way down the road of segmenting the subject pronoun from the verb, to those who did not seem to have even started the process.
2. The breakdown of the chunks under consideration was linked to the creative emergence of the subject pronoun system in non-formulaic contexts.
3. Within this continuum, our learners fell into 3 broad categories:
  - (a) learners who, by the end of our study, had analysed the chunks into their constituents and freed the subject pronoun for use elsewhere (09, 27, 57; and 02, 60, although not so unequivocally; 31.25%);
  - (b) pupils who were at a later point of entry along this same developmental path by the end of the study, or, if their point of entry was as early, were progressing more slowly and tentatively along the continuum (03, 24, 26, 38, 52; 31.25%);

- (c) pupils who had made no progress along this developmental path after 2 years (34, 43, 45, 51; perhaps also 12, 26, although less convincingly; 37.5%).

### *Cross-Learner Variation*

To facilitate comparison among the pupils, we juxtapose in Table 10 the data for 3 learners, one from each of the three broad groups described above (a, b, and c).

Most of one pupil's (27) utterances were targetlike; another (43) produced very few utterances; the third (03) produced a spread across both columns, though tending more towards the nontargetlike. In the case of pupil 27, *il* and *elle* seemed to be becoming established at an early stage (as is borne out by the use of both pronouns with other verbs too in Rounds 1, 4 and 5); at the same time, he rarely showed difficulties with segmentation. The apparent backsliding in Round 6 (*il j'aime, il j'adore*) did not overturn the general trend; in any case, it falls in line with a process expected to be recursive rather than straightforwardly linear.

Pupil 43, on the other hand, produced few utterances, of which a high proportion were idiosyncratic. Apparently this pupil was in no way tackling the segmentation issue; the data elsewhere support this impression. Furthermore, pupil 43 produced third person pronouns scarcely at all: other than when directly repeating after partner or researcher, he only produced *il* once and *elle* four times at a late stage, in Round 5 (where he used *elle* for both "he" and "she"), and this in the context of receiving considerable researcher support.

Data for pupil 03 provide a window on the gradual breakdown of utterances that seemed to function initially as unanalysed chunks. Indeed, pupil 03's data show more in this respect than those from a high achiever like pupil 09, whose transition between formulaic/creative use was generally too seamless to identify. Pupil 03 produced the third person pronouns already in Round 1, albeit to some extent in ways suggestive of chunklike use; *il a* and

TABLE 10

*Three pupils' uses of "aimer", "adorer", and "habiter"*

	PUPIL 27		PUPIL 03		PUPIL 43	
	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>
ROUND 1	je n'aime pas j'habite il habite où? où habites-tu?		j'adore j'habite il habite où habites-tu?	il a .. elle a habite en français? (does she live in France?)		
ROUND 2	j'aime il aime elle aime Pierre aime je n'aime pas il n'aime pas elle n'aime pas qu'est-ce que tu aimes? il adore	(name) j'adore (X loves)	j'aime je n'aime pas j'adore j'habite elle habite	j'aime? (do you like?) j'aim(she likes) (name) j'aime (X likes) je n'aime pas? (don't you like?) (name) je n'aime pas (X doesn't like) j'adore? (do you love?) (name) j'adore (X loves) où habites-tu? (where does he/she live?)	j'adore (name) j'adore (X loves) j'ai adore j'ai adore (she/he loves) je adore (name) je adore (X loves)	



TABLE 10 (continued)

*Three pupils' uses of "aimer", "adorer", and "habiter"*

	PUPIL 27		PUPIL 03		PUPIL 43	
	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>
ROUND 4	j'habite is it il habite? il habite où?		j'aime j'adore j'habite	j'aime? (do you like?) il y a j'aime (ambiguous) il y a aime? (does he like?) adore (I love) j'adore? (do you love?) il y habite une piscine? (where is the pool?) il y habite Alan? il y habite (town)?		j'ai habite
ROUND 5	j'aime tu aimes?	pas j'aime (I don't like) pas j'adore (I don't love)	j'adore j'habite	je n'aime pas (I haven't got) elle a j'adore .. (is she ...ing?)	tu aimes?	

TABLE 10 (continued)

*Three pupils' uses of "aimer", "adorer", and "habiter"*

PUPIL 27		PUPIL 03		PUPIL 43	
<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>	<i>Targetlike use</i>	<i>Nontargetlike / idiosyncratic use</i>
ROUND 5 (continued)			il adore le livre? (is he reading?) il adore le foot? (is he playing football?) il y habite à (town) (ambiguous = I live (?))		
ROUND 6	tu aimes? il j'aime (he likes) il n'aime pas il j'adore (he loves)	j'adore aime (likes) il adore	j'aime (he likes) (name) j'aime (X likes) (name) je n'aime pas (X doesn't like) il j'adore (he likes)		je n'aime faire (he doesn't like)

*Note:* Excludes Round 3.

*elle a* (he has/she has) occurred elsewhere in the data and may well have been unanalysed at this stage. In Round 2, pupil 03 produced a proliferation of first person verb forms to cover second and third person reference; *j'habite*, however, appears already to be in the process of breakdown:

(24) *j'ai .. no oh .. elle habite le* (town)

(I have .. no oh .. she lives in [town], pupil 03, Round 2)

In Round 4 the process was complicated by the arrival on the scene of *il y a* (there is/are), used intensively in the classroom from Round 3 onwards. Thus, pupil 03 used *il y habite* for “where does he live” and *il y a aime* for “does he like”; elsewhere in this round he also juxtaposed *il y a* and *elle y a* to differentiate between boy and girl in the researcher’s photos. The data from this stage abounded with idiosyncratic pronoun-verb combinations as pupil 03 began to sort out the system; this continued well into Round 5, for instance, where he was trying to find out from the researcher the location and activities of four people in a picture he could not see:

(25) *elle a j'adore le .. un magasin? (..) elle a .. euh j'adore le foot?*  
*(..) euh .. il .. j'ador- il adore la livre? (..) un garçon euh ..*  
*il y a .. umm il adore le foot? (..) umm .. il adore le livre?*  
 (she has I love the .. a shop? (= ‘is she in a shop?’) [...] she  
 has euh I love football? (= ‘is she playing football?’) [...] euh  
 he .. I lov- does he love the book? (= ‘is he reading a book?’)  
 [...] a boy euh there is umm does he love football? (= is the  
 boy playing football?), 03, 5)

In Round 6, pupil 03 continued to use *j'aime* and *j'adore* in chunklike ways; his spontaneous production made it clear that he was far from having internalised the rules for generating targetlike pronoun-verb combinations. Nevertheless, he at least seemed en route to doing so. In this extract from Round 6, he was helping his partner:

(26) (17) *j'ai ..* (I have)

(03) (WHISPERS) *NO IL IL* (NO HE HE)

(17) *il .. (whispers) how do you say likes? il*

(he .. how do you say likes? he)

(03) (WHISPERS) *AIME .. AIME (LIKES .. LIKES)*

The more opportunity he had to engage in spoken interaction, the more likely he was to begin to deconstruct the chunks. For example, in Round 6, he was well into the interaction before the chunklike *j'adore* gave way to *il adore*:

(27) *Richard est j'adore le ping-pong (..) ah oui il adore la musée*

(Richard is I love table-tennis [...] ah yes he loves museums, 03, 6)

The latter shift often happened also when a pupil (not only 03) had the opportunity for extended interaction with a peer and/or researcher, when a process of “scaffolding” occurred.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, some pupils (e.g., 25, 43) could only on these occasions produce pronouns they seemed otherwise unable to access, a feature with pedagogical implications beyond our scope.

### *Summary and Implications*

Clearly, for most of these learners, initially unanalysed utterances did break down. Moreover, this breakdown was linked with the emergence of the pronoun system, and seemed to be triggered by the need to establish reference. However, did the proliferation of initially unanalysed first-person verb forms in the learners' production lead them to tackle the segmentation issue, contributing to their competence in generating verb forms with a variety of pronouns? Or did the increasing use of subject pronouns other than *je*, impinging on the analysis of first-person verb forms, bring the segmentation issue into prominence? Probably we face a two-way process; the use of formulaic language therefore has a role beyond that of facilitating entry into communication and speeding up production. Our data make it evident that the use of formulas did indeed facilitate entry into communication and speed

up production in the early stages. In fact, learners could not initially rely on much else in order to hold the kind of “conversations” required by the classroom context. Later, as the learners’ communicative needs developed beyond the highly-structured exchanges of the beginners’ class, the formulas provided for those exchanges became inadequate. These early formulas were typically about the exchange, usually in pairs, of personal information, and they involved second person interrogatives (e.g., *où habites-tu?* where do you live?) and first person declaratives (e.g., *j’habite à ...* I live in ...), with third parties rarely involved. What triggered the breakdown process in our data was the pupils’ realisation—whether subconscious or not—that the well-practised classroom routines with which they were familiar proved inadequate when talking about third parties—frequently the case in the tasks we asked them to perform. This realisation, quite clear in a number of our examples, typically coincided with the onset of chunk breakdown. Our learners, or at least the 62.5% who showed signs of breaking down the chunks, did not immediately drop those formulas from their repertoire because of their inadequacies. In fact, they kept using them extensively, but started modifying them in a number of ways, suggesting that they did use the formulas as a database for hypothesis testing. Initially, they might just “tag on” a correct reference to the unchanged formula.

In a second stage, as third person formulas entered their repertoire, the segmentation process itself began. We suggest that the pressure of communicative needs beyond the well-practised classroom routines triggered the breakdown process. However, far from dropping the chunks from their interlanguage at this stage, the learners actively “worked on” them, and fed them directly into the creative construction process, as clearly shown by the correlation between chunks breakdown and the pronoun system’s emergence.

Researchers have also shown communicative needs to be the driving force behind early development in naturalistic settings (e.g., Perdue, 1993; and the work of the European Science Foundation team). However, the role played by formulaic language in this development has not been investigated; for example, the European

Science Foundation team deliberately eliminated all chunks from their analysis. Although probably less prevalent in naturalistic settings than in the classroom, formulaic language nonetheless occurs in naturalistic settings also. Its contribution to development raises interesting research possibilities. As to the pedagogical implications of our research, we suggest at this point only that extended opportunities for conversational interaction and "scaffolding" by a more competent target-language speaker moved the pupils forward, perhaps by enabling them to compare their own formulas to incoming input in order to tackle the process of analysis.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>We decided, for reasons of economy, ease of transcription, and ease of readability, to avoid phonetic transcription; we therefore aimed to use conventional French orthography, and to avoid "invented" spellings wherever possible. As a result, the transcription of certain utterances seems to ascribe to them a grammatical form which they may not necessarily have had in practice. A good example is "*j'ai*" ("I have"): It frequently appears in the transcripts to denote a particular sequence of sounds, though not necessarily indicating that the learner is using (or intending to use) the present tense of '*avoir*' with the first person. For a discussion of transcription, see Blanche-Benveniste and Jeanjean (1986).

<sup>2</sup>We will report elsewhere on negative utterances apparently functioning as unanalysed chunks.

<sup>3</sup>Some pupils in this group (9, 60, 27) seemed to break the chunks down almost from the start, suggesting that they did not "chunk" as the other learners did. However, they also overextended some of the chunks they used (especially structurally more complex interrogative chunks; see Myles, Mitchell & Hooper, in press). This implies that they did start with chunks, but could start the segmentation process earlier than the other learners and have proceeded along the developmental route faster.

<sup>4</sup>These groupings do not entirely mirror the learners' ability groupings as determined by the schools; although 02, 09, 27, 57 and 60 were all top-set pupils, three top-set girls (24, 38, 52) among the pupils presented ambiguous data; two boys assigned to a mid-ability set (43, 45) were among those who seemed to be making little progress with segmentation.

<sup>5</sup>Lantolf and Appel (1994) provide a full discussion of this phenomenon.

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## Appendix

Table 11

*Tasks completed by individual pupils (columns = tasks, with digit = round of elicitation; rows = individual learners)*

	1A	1D	1D R	2A	2D	3B	3D R	4A	4D D	5C	5D	6B	6D D
02	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
03	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
09	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
26		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
38	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
43		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* A total of 190 tasks were completed.

*Description of Tasks*

Each of the six rounds of data-gathering included a pairtask (Table 11, denoted by the letter D). In Rounds 1 and 3, this task involved an information-gap activity, each pupil in turn having to describe the appearance of a person in a given picture for their partner to draw (1DR, 3DR). The other pairtask in Round 1 (1D) involved an exchange of personal information; we instructed two pupils to ask and answer core questions relating to their ages, siblings, homes and pets; they could, if they wished, add questions

of their own. (Some pupils, for example, spontaneously asked about likes and dislikes.) The pairtask in Round 2 (2D) focused specifically on likes and dislikes, pupils in pairs exchanging information about their own likes and dislikes, then about two imaginary French “penfriends” for whom they each had partial information in the form of symbols with ticks and crosses representing degrees of liking. A telephone conversation to discuss arrangements to meet was the focus of the Round 4 pairtask (4DD), where pupils had to agree on activities, venue, date and time, and to consider the possibility of bringing an imaginary friend; this task was repeated in Round 6 (6DD). The rubric for the Round 5 pairtask (5D) was less prescriptive: We simply instructed pupils to choose a topic (one of four) and to initiate and sustain a conversation in French as best they could, with a cue-sheet providing relevant French vocabulary items as prompts.

In each round, there was also a one-to-one interaction with an adult researcher. In Rounds 1, 2, and 4 (1A, 2A, 4A), this involved the researchers’ using their personal family photographs to elicit questions from the pupils, and to lead into “conversation” around the pupil’s own family life and leisure activities. In Round 5, the one-to-one task (5C) involved an information-gap activity, the pupil and researcher each having a picture of a town scene where the background was the same, but with four figures placed in the researcher’s and not in the pupil’s picture; by means of question and answer, the pupil had to discover the location, appearance and activities of the four people in order to sketch them in. Finally, in Rounds 3 and 6 (3B, 6B), we asked each pupil to recount a story in a series of pictures, after first hearing it told in simple present-tense French by the researcher (the same story in both rounds).